

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4347
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
INFO /USINT BAGHDAD 94
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY SANA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MUSCAT 0721

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, MU
SUBJECT: ALLEGED RECURRENCE OF FIGHTING IN DHOFAR

REF TEHRAN 4500

SUMMARY: APRIL 22 INCIDENT MENTIONED REFTEL WAS SMALL-SCALE CLASH WITHOUT CASUALTIES. EVENTS LIKE THIS HAVE OCCURRED FROM TIME TO TIME IN DHOFAR SINCE THE WAR ENDED. THERE WILL PROBABLY BE ANOTHER ONE AROUND JUNE 9, PFLO'S MAIN ANNIVERSARY AND A NATURAL OCCASION FOR PFLO-INITIATED INCIDENTS. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE VISIBLE FROM HERE THAT ANY SIGNIFICANT STEP-UP IN THE INSURGENCY WILL TAKE PLACE SOON, EVEN THOUGH HANDFUL OF HARD-CORE PFLO CADRES REMAIN AT LARGE IN EASTERN DHOFAR MOUNTAINS. HOWEVER, SULTANATE FORCES SEEM UNABLE TO WEED THESE REBELS OUT. OMANGOV IS WELL AWARE THAT INSURGENCY COULD EVENTUALLY REVIVE, AND OMANIS EXPRESS WORRY ABOUT EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS, SUCH AS RECENT EVENTS IN HORN OF AFRICA AND AFGHANISTAN. END SUMMARY.

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1. COL KENNETH DODSON, PRINCIPAL STAFF OFFICER OF SULTAN OF OMAN'S LAND FORCES (SOLF), BRIEFED CHARGE MAY 13 ABOUT APRIL 22 INCIDENT MENTIONED REFTEL. WE TOO HAD SEEN FBIS ITEM GIVING ADEN RADIO'S VERSION OF THIS EVENT, AND MOREOVER HAD HEARD REPORTS THAT PDRY IS BUILDING UP BORDER DEFENSES AROUND HABRUT. WE SOUGHT BRIEFING TO CLARIFY THESE AND OTHER RECENT INDICATIONS THAT THERE MAY BE CAUSE FOR HEIGHTENED WORRY ABOUT OMAN'S SECURITY.

2. DODSON SHOWED CHARGE SOLF'S STAFF REPORT ON THE APRIL 22 INCIDENT. AT MID-DAY A PLATOON-SIZE PATROL OF SOLF'S SOUTHERN BRIGADE CROSSED WADI SHUFLOON IN EASTERN DHOFAR (ON NORTHERN SIDE OF ESCARPMENT DUE NORTH OF MIRBAT) AND WAS FIRED UPON BY BAND OF PFLO FROM SURROUNDING HILLS. THIS IS THE GERNERAL AREA WHERE 55 OR SO HARD-CORE PFLO CADRES ARE KNOWN TO BE HANGING ON SINCE DEFEAT OF INSURGENCY IN LATE 1975. THE PLATOON FIRED BACK AND, AFTER RECEIVING RADIOED PERMISSION FROM HQ TO USE MORTARS, FIRED BARRAGES AT THE ENEMY HIDING AMONG THE ROCKS. AFTER 20 MINUTES THE PFLO BROKE AND RAN. SOLF UNITS SPENT THE REST OF THE DAY SEARCHING FOR THEM, WITHOUT SUCCESS. EXAMINATION OF LOCATIONS IN HILLS FROM WHICH PFLO HAD FIRED SUGGESTED THERE HAD BEEN FIVE OF THEM IN ALL. THERE WERE NO KILLED OR WOUNDED ON EITHER SIDE. PLATOON'S EXPENDITURE OF AMMUNITION WAS RATHER LARGE: 1500 ROUNDS OF 7.62. MM CARTRIDGES, 52 ROUNDS OF 81 MM MORTAR SHELLS, ONE 81 MM SMOKE SHELL, AND 16 ROUNDS OF M60 ROCKET GRENADES.

3. SOLF JUDGED THAT THE REASON FOR THE ATTACK WAS PROBABLY THAT THESE PFLO CADRES HAD SIMPLY WANDERED INTO THE AREA BEARING WEAPONS, HAD SPOTTED THE PATROL AND SEEN THAT IT WAS SMALL, AND HAD SEIZED THE TARGET OF OPPORTUNITY. AS REFTEL NOTES, SUCH INCIDENTS DO OCCUR FROM TIME TO TIME. DODSON SAID THIS WAS THE FIRST CONTACT OF ITS TYPE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. MINING INCIDENTS ALSO TAKE PLACE OCCASIONALLY.

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4. DODSON PREDICTED THAT ON OR ABOUT JUNE 9, PFLO'S MAJOR ANNIVERSARY, THERE ALMOST CERTAINLY WILL BE A PFLO-INITIATED CONTACT OF SOME KIND. IF THE PATTERN OF THE LAST TWO YEARS HOLDS, THE EVENT WILL BE INHERENTLY INSIGNIFICANT BUT WILL BE PROCLAIMED TO THE WORLD AS A MAJOR "VICTORY" ON ADEN RADIO. THESE ARE MAINLY CREDIBILITY-KEEPING AND MORALE-BUILDING EXERCIESES.

5. ASKED ABOUT THE ALLEGED PDRY BUILDUP NEAR HABRUT ON THE BORDER, DODSON SEEMED MYSTIFIED AS TO WHAT SUCH REPORTS COULD REFR TO. SOLF WATCHES THE PDRY BORDER ACTIVITIES CLOSELY, AND IT KNOWS OF NOTHING UNUSUAL UNDER WAY AT PRESENT. (COMMENT: DODSON THUS REPEATED EARLIER ASSESSMENT OF ANOTHER SOLF STAFF OFFICER REPORTED MUSCAT 0357 THAT BORDER ACTIVITIES OF PDRY SHOW NO SIGN THAT ANY MAJOR MILITARY MOVE INTO OMAN IS IMMINENT.)

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MUSCAT 0721

6. CHARGE ALSO MENTIONED RECENT OMANGOV DECISION TO SWITCH DIRECTION OF PROJECTED EASTERN DHOFAR OIL PIPELINE FROM SOUTHWARD TO NORTHWARD (SEE MUSCAT 0465 NOTAL), NOTING THERE IS WIDE-SPREAD SPECULATION LOCALLY THAT DECISION RELATES SOMEHOW TO SECURITY. AGAIN, DODSON EXPRESSED PUZZLEMENT AS TO WHAT BAIS OF THIS CONCERN MIGHT BE. HOWEVER, HE DID REFER TO THE SULTANATE'S "FIRQA" TRIBAL LEVIES OPERATING IN THE DHOFAR MOUNTAINS (MAINLY FORMER PFLO REBELS) AS A WEAK LINK IN DHOFAR'S DEFENSES. THEIR FUNDAMENTAL LOYALTY IS UNCERTAIN. EVEN THOUGH MANY OF THEM MAY KNOW WHERE THE 50-ODD HOLED-UP PFLO CADRES ARE HIDING, THEY DO VERY LITTLE TOHELP THE GOVERNMENT UNCOVER THESE LAST REMAINING ENEMY.

7. CHARGE POINTED OUT THE RESURRECTED DESIGNATION "PFLOAG" IN THE FBIS ITEM, ASKING IF THERE WERE ANY SIGNIFICANCE IN IT. DODSON KNEW OF NONE, BUT SPECULATED THAT IT COULD SIGNAL A NEW PFLO STRATEGY THT SOLF HAS LONG HALF-EXPECTED, NAMELY
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A REDUCED EMPHASIS ON ARMED INSURGENCY IN DHOFAR AND A FOCUS ON TERRORISM IN NORTHERN OMAN AND THE COUNTRIES UP THE GULF.

COMMENTS:

8. THE ABOVE BRIEFING CONFIRMS PICTURE WE HAVE GOTTEN FROM THE

OMANI MILITARY FOR ABOUT TWO YEARS RUNNING. THEME IS THAT PEACE PREVAILS IN DHOFAR MARRED ONLY NW AND THEN BY INCIDENTS LIKE THIS ONE. SUCH EVENTS ARE UNIMPORTANT IN THEMSELVES BUT SERVE AS REMINDER THAT SULTAN'S ENEMY IS STILL THERE.

9. UNLESS THE REMAINING PFLO CADRES ARE TOTALLY WEEDED OUT- AND THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE IN THE CARDS - THE DANGER OF AN EVENTUAL REVIVAL OF THE REBELLION IN SOME FORM REMAINS. THE OMANIS ARE WELL AWARE OF THIS. WHETHER OR NOT RENEWED INSURGENCY ACTUALLY OCCURS WILL DEPEND ON A VARIETY OF FACTORS, INCLUDING EXTERNAL ONES BEYOND OMANI CONTROL. RECENT EVENTS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA AND AFGHANISTAN HAVE MADE OMANI POLITICAL LEADERS A BIT JITTERY, OR ATLEAST SO THEY SAY TO ANYBODY WHO WILL LISTEN (SEE MUSCAT A-23 OF 5/10/78). BUT THE EVIDENCE CLOSE AT HAND, AS SEEN BY THE OMANI MILITARY WATCHING THE BORDER AND THE PFLO IN DHOFAR, FAILS TO SHOW DANGER IN THE IMMEDIATE PERIOD AHEAD.
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